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ABSTRACT

A United Church of Canada research project attempted to determine whether the "functional community" concept was a viable basis for restructuring congregations for rural ministry in Colchester County, Nova Scotia. Research documented the functional community concept via socioeconomic variables such as social and political history, economic structures and labor patterns, community contacts, etc. Findings revealed that the villages were functioning as one community, but the churches were competitive and in many respects "dysfunctional." Based on the research, suggested alternative forms of parish organization included: (1) the Group Ministry Model (two or more denominations working together in a loose structure under guidance of a lay council); (2) the Cluster Model (the entire functional community under one overall planning committee via a steering committee made up of each professional leader and congregational representatives); (3) the Area Ministry Model (similar to Cluster Model with a specified geographical functional area, ministers and laymen working together as a team, a discovery process for area needs and remediation, and continuing education for clergy and laity); (4) the Pastoral Zone Model (a central staff, a pastoral zone planning council and council, congregational units, and neighborhood groups). (JC)

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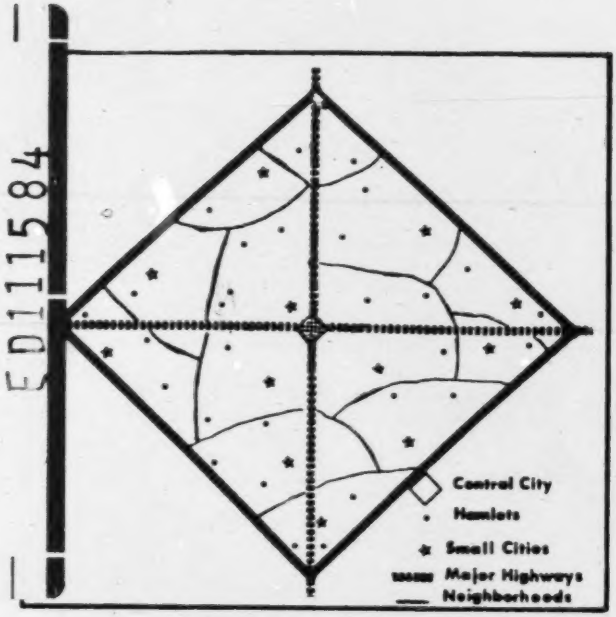

THE FUNCTIONAL COMMUNITY AND RURAL PARISH ORGANIZATION.

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THE FUNCTIONAL COMMUNITY AND RURAL PARISH ORGANIZATION

By Lester M. Settle, M.Th.

Rural North America - Pioneer Era

In the pioneer era of the 18th and 19th centuries, Rural North America established a land settlement pattern based on village life similar to the European pattern. Families built their homes, a school was established and quite often followed by a church. Eventually a local entrepreneur started a "general store" which served as post office, shopping center, news media, etc. Village life, transportation and communication was rather static, confined and restricted to a small geographical area subject to an hour "horse haul" (5-6 miles). These rural villages, prior to the automobile, were viable and functional communities. The people depended upon and related to one another in a personal manner for most of the goods, services, fellowship and social contacts they required.

The parish organization of Rural Churches in those days tended to coincide pretty much to the community and the way it functioned. Dr. Bernard Quinn[1] has diagramed the relationship of the small community of the pre 1930's as follows:

Where people knew each other personally

Where people work, trade, and carry on their daily social life

Where social systems interact with each other: an area large enough for effective interdependent action relating to daily life

In the traditional small community all three boundaries generally coincide within an area containing relatively few people.

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It is possible to super-impose on Quinn's diagram the influence of the church in this manner:

= influence or outreach of the church in the community

that is -- the church community and its influence coincided with the village or the functional community of those days.

The Rural Parish system was responding to the kind of community that existed and the way it functioned.

The Industrial Event

With the automobile and the industrial revolution, the self-contained, small community prior to the 1930's began to disintegrate in function and grow larger in size. What was once a former community now was reduced to a "neighbourhood" so far as function is concerned.

The process was hastened by consolidation of rural schools and government services to centralized areas. The general store was replaced by the supermarket of larger shopping centers, and people of rural society began driving 20 to 25 miles and up to 50 miles for their goods and services.

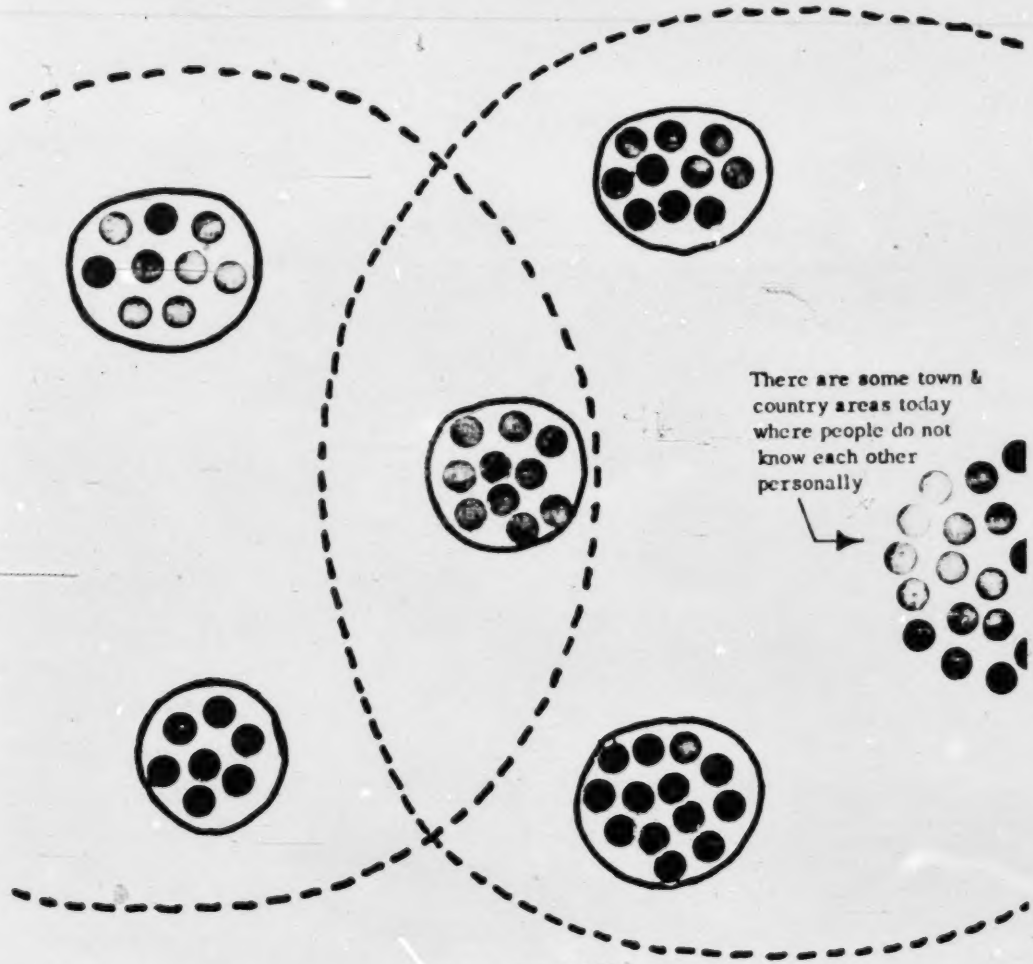
Traditional vs. Functional Community

The traditional rural community of five or six square miles or less was "eclipsed" by a community of 40 - 50 square miles, but still represented by an hour driving time by automobile. Community became defined in terms of function, related to trade, economic and social factors, rather than the personal, face to face relationships of the pioneer era. C. J. Galpin, as early as 1915,[2] came to the conclusion that (1) a community is shaped by the

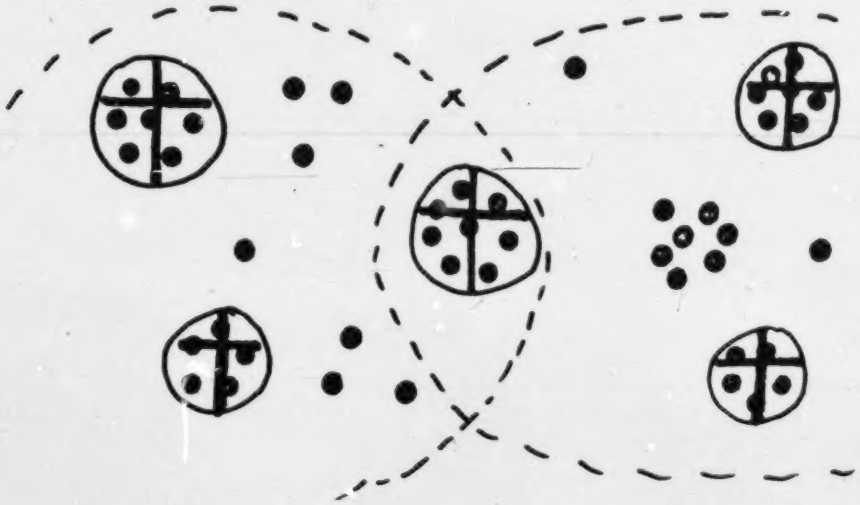
way people behave (i.e. economic and social behavior patterns), (2) that the outer boundaries of a community are approximately one hour's driving time from the center.

More recently (1965), Karl A. Fox[3], an economist, applied Galpin's concept of Trade Area Community to the industrialized, urban society of today. While Galpin found about 10 rural communities in a county, Fox found 10 counties in one community which he called "Functional Economic Areas".[4]

So now again Quinn has diagramed this change as follows:



In relation to that change, the Rural Church parish system following the 1930's continued to be based on the traditional type of community. As changes continued, the Rural parish system would look like this according to Quinn's diagram:



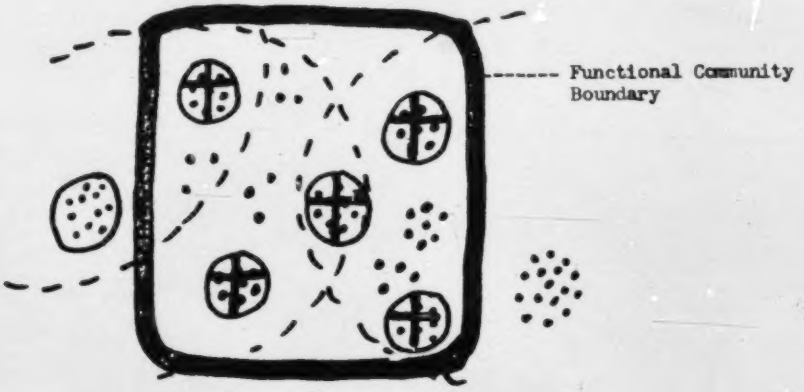
Each parish unit remained independent and separated from the other.

Fox's "Functional Economic Area" has no precise definition--it corresponds to no survey lines and varies in size and content from one region to another. It has been called "Functional Planning Area", "Labor Market Area", an "Expanded Rural City", or a "Functional Sociological Area". Dr. Marvin Judy, who has devoted himself to a study of Rural Church parish systems, calls it an "Enlarged Community"[5] and says that this enlarged community is a proper base for church parish organization, cooperative planning and mission.

Functional Community

I prefer to use the term "Functional Community" to describe this new expression of community--a community which consists of two or more former rural communities and many neighbourhoods, bound together in a natural economic or political area with a dominant town or city center, which serves as a trade, cultural and social center.

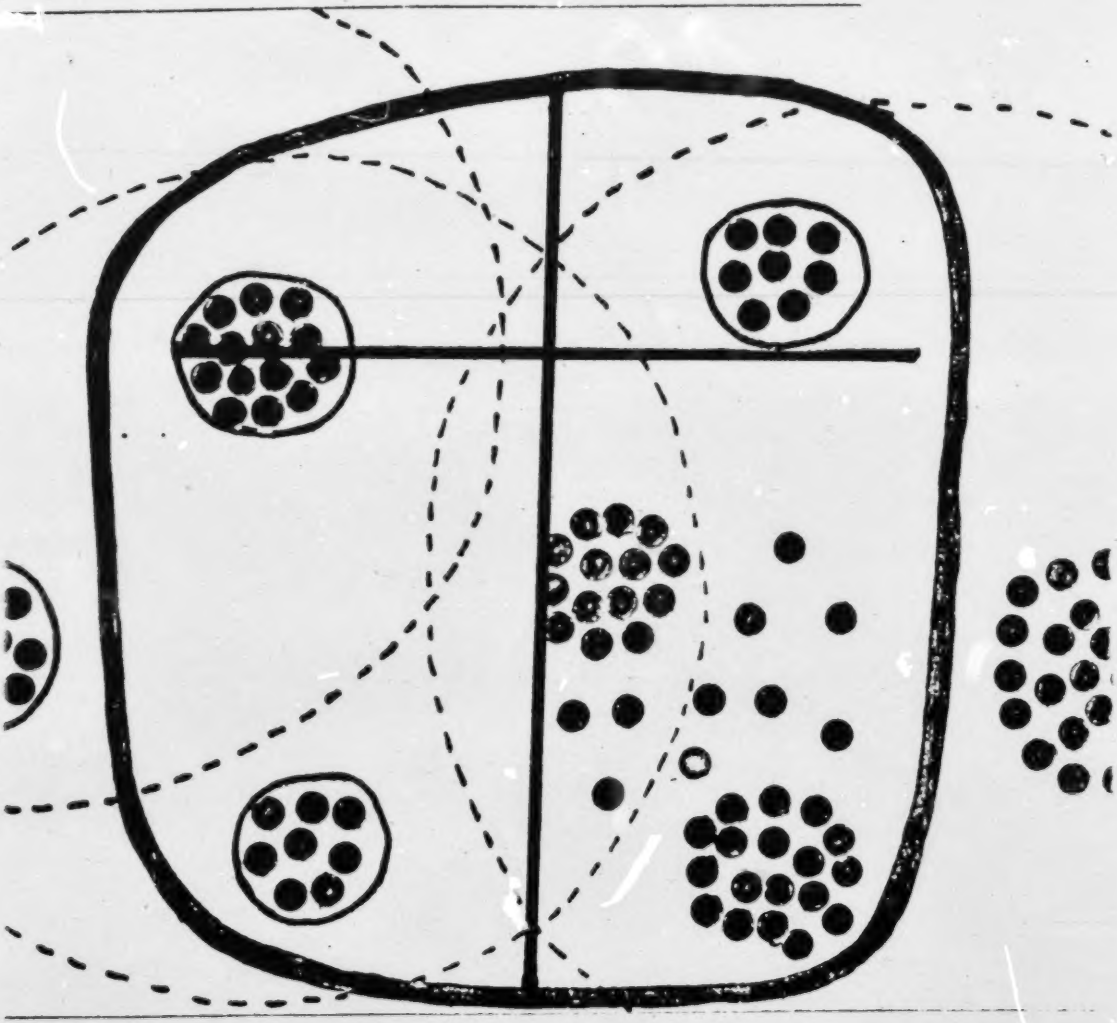
Quinn's diagram for this functional community is as follows:



Challenge to Rural Church

The challenge of the Functional Community for the Rural Church, as I see it, is to once again design a parish system that will coincide with the Functional Community as closely as possible.

The object, then, is to design a rural parish organization whose thrust and influence would be felt throughout the whole enlarged or Functional Community, see diagram following, page 6.



Where people know each other personally. People will know each other in some localities; in others they will not.

Where people go for jobs, trade, services, and social life. The radius of interaction will tend to increase and interaction-boundaries will tend to overlap and disappear.

Where social systems can interact with each other in multi-county areas large enough for effective interdependent action relating to the socio-economic environment. Will these boundaries emerge?

Where the influence and outreach of the church is extended.

Failure of Amalgamation--Consolidation Program

Amalgamation and Consolidation schemes within Rural Church communities (1940 to 1960) have attempted to respond to the emerging Functional Community. In our Canadian experience, not too many of these amalgamations and consolidations have been successful in reaching the various sub-neighbourhoods and scattered individuals of the area. They represent an attempt to impose a large super-structure over a geographical area without any legal way in which to make it work. The Church remains a voluntary organization, and its parish organization must fit into the voluntary framework.

West Colchester Research Project

In July, 1969, the United Church of Canada funded a Research Project in West Colchester County of Nova Scotia[6] to determine whether the Functional Community concept is a viable and suitable basis for renewing and restructuring Christian congregations for ministry and mission in rural areas.

It was recognized that the concept as defined in United States studies and literature would need to be modified when applied to a rural area of Nova Scotia with a decreased scale of population and space. The writer was appointed Research Director.

Variables

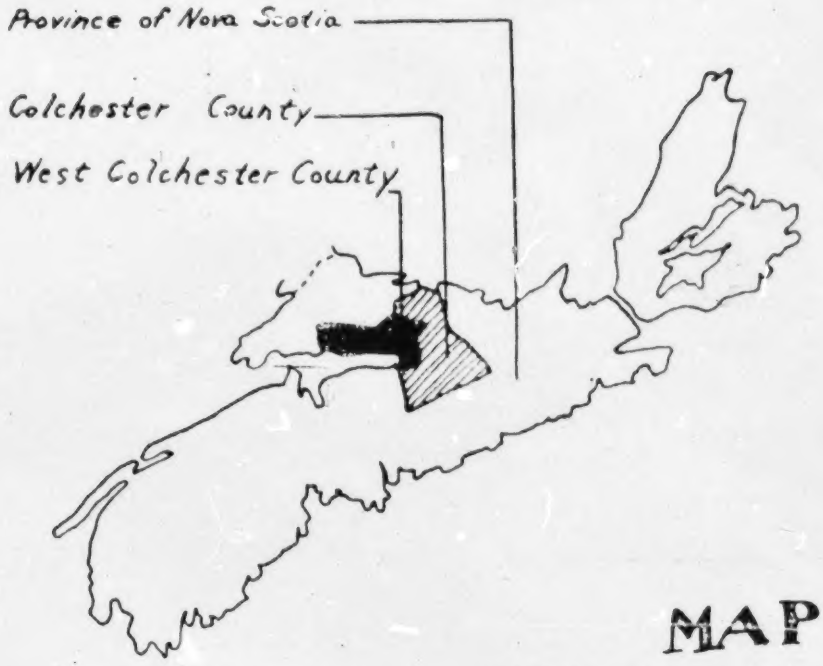
The research undertook, first of all, to document the concept of Functional Community as applied to West Colchester, making use of the following social and economic variables:

Geography and topography
Social and political history
Population (rural)
Transportation and traffic flows
Communication networks
Economic structures and labor patterns
Community identification and leadership
Educational facilities
Social status
Community contacts
Concept of community[7]

WEST COLCHESTER COUNTY

Research Project

COLCHESTER COUNTY
NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA



MAP # 1

Conclusion of Research

It was concluded from the research[8] that the villages of West Colchester County area are linked together in such a manner that they function as one community in matters of trade, transportation, education, communication, social status, community identification, etc. In total, the villages provide a number of services which make them inter-dependent and functional when grouped together.

Churches of West Colchester

It was found, however, that the Churches of West Colchester were in many respects "dysfunctional". They acted as small groups of people on a competitive basis and operate within a parish system designed for horse and buggy days. Clergy bypass and travel through each others parish areas constantly, without any relationship to one another. There is no planning of or witness for total Christian mission and outreach.

Measurement of Effectiveness

Three tests of effectiveness were applied to the churches.

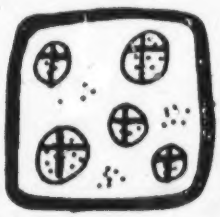
1. A method developed by Donald Kuehle of Garrett Theological Seminary[9] based on programming of the churches. When Kuehle's method was applied, less than 50% of the churches were scored as effective.

2. Another measurement, comparing the enrollment of children and youth in church educational and fellowship programs, showed less than 50% of the youth being reached or served.

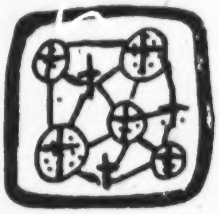
3. The way congregations spend their income was used as a third measure of effectiveness. Church planners have stated that a church spending less than 30% of its annual revenue on mission work outside the local congregation or community is ineffective. The total mission givings of the churches in West Colchester were about 15% of annual revenues.

The Churches of West Colchester Functional Community were not working together in any significant way. They were like individual cells in the

communities with no connecting links. Diagramed they would look like:



while to have impact on the community, they would need to look like →



i.e. they would need to form a network of cells that would provide influence and thrust in the total Functional Community.

Attempted Readjustment

The Research Project was also designed to suggest alternative forms of parish organization for the Rural Churches of West Colchester County. Four were suggested, The Group Ministry Model, The Cluster Model, The Area Ministry Model, and the Parish Zone Model.

THE GROUP MINISTRY MODEL:

The Group Ministry

Charge 1	Charge 2	Charge 3
Pastor	Pastor	Pastor
Director	Church A	Church A
Church A	Church B	Church B
Church B	Church C	Church C

The Group Ministry is a cooperative arrangement whereby two or more independent pastoral charges or denominations in a given geographical area, town or city (a Functional Community) work together for nurture and mission in a loosely and less structured manner. The group ministry is voluntaristic from the standpoint of Congregations, Pastoral Charges and Ministers. The work of the Group Ministry is outlined and supervised by a Group Ministry Council made up of lay representatives from each of the participating churches, plus the clergy and

professional leaders involved in the group. As noted above, a whole chapter of the research study is devoted to this model and its application to West Colchester, with working constitution, etc.

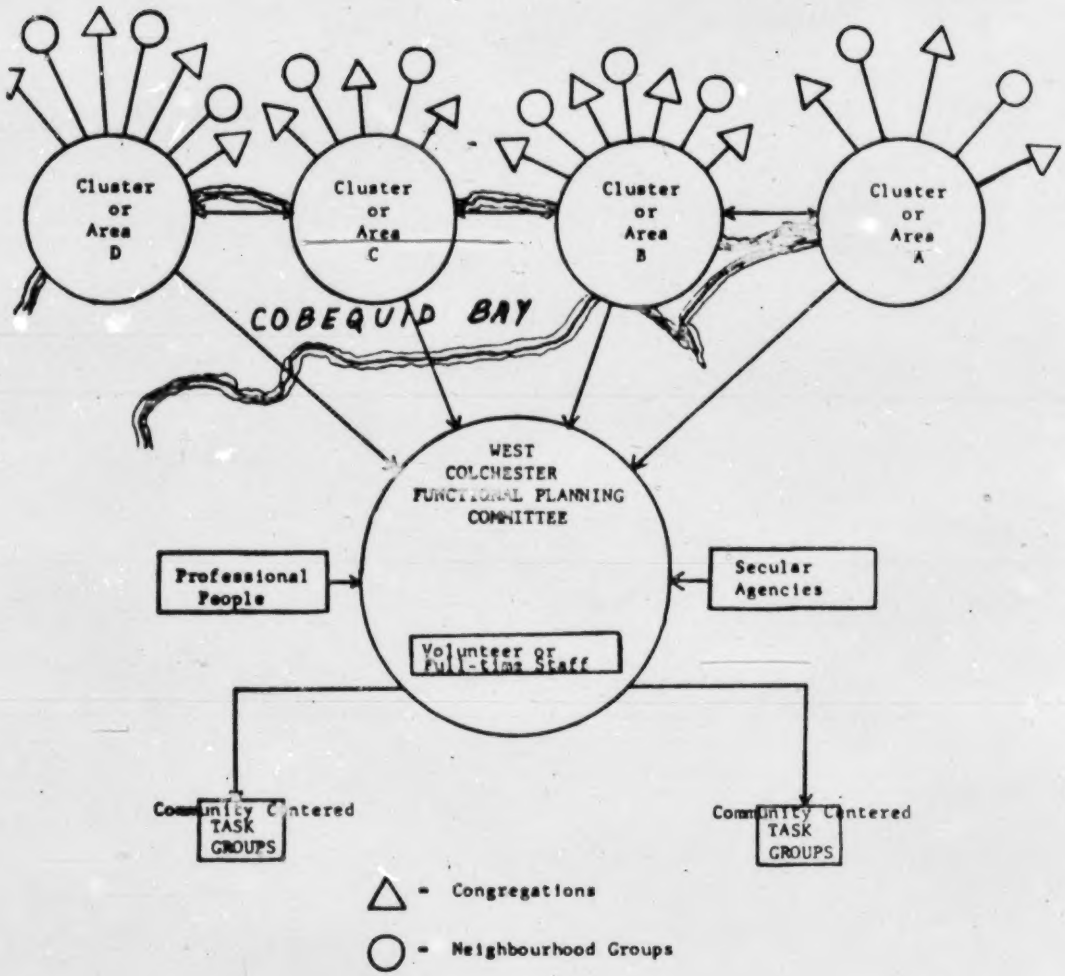
THE CLUSTER MODEL:

The Cluster Model (see diagram Page 12), with its Central Steering Planning Committee is one that could work in West Colchester County. The whole functional community is taken into consideration and brought under one over-all planning committee through the Steering Committee. Each professional leader plus congregational representatives make up the membership of this group. This planning group might be called West Colchester Planning Cabinet. Coalitions might be formed with secular organizations and agencies interested in more integrated planning in the Functional Community. Professional persons with special skills and insights might also be co-opted as resource persons into the Central Planning Committee.

The recognition of and the preserving of the integrity of the different denominations of West Colchester County could be maintained and enhanced by permitting each congregation to associate with the Cluster and the Planning Cabinet on a volunteer basis. Neighbourhood identities and feelings could be recognized by means of inviting local congregations to form association with the Cluster of their choice. West Colchester County does divide into four natural areas, clusters or zones, based largely on the school district subdivisions in the County.

While trying to keep a viable unit for the purpose of church planning and programming, the churches in the four areas may be grouped together, and it becomes clear that each area represents a viable unit, judged by the potential number of persons and the financial resources that might be available for ministry. Overlapping and over-churching and the lack of some programs of mission and nurture becomes more obvious in the areas or zones as well.

WEST COLCHESTER CLUSTER MODEL



The lines between the areas do not need to be hard and fixed; if one congregation would be inclined to cross the given lines in order to feel more "at home" and "significant" in another area, that congregation should be free to do so. The important thing will be for the churches in the neighbourhood clusters to get together regularly for programs, worship, fellowship, planning, work, etc. Small nuclear study fellowships or task groups might be formed on a "road" or "section" basis.

An integral part of the Cluster Model as described is the use to be made of the planning process. The planning process becomes the tool for implementation of the model, as well as the tool for purposeful fulfilment of mission and nurture.

Clustering of the congregations in West Colchester County could be the solution whereby the congregations could become more effective in the programs they could offer to the youth and adults of the neighbourhoods. It would help the church to establish itself as one Church of Jesus Christ in the community, interested in proclaiming a saving message to all for the meaning that message might bring to individual lives and the community as a whole. It would move the congregations away from competition and encourage them in cooperation. Congregations working together in given areas would find new and better solutions to long-standing church and community issues and problems than if they were to try to solve them in isolation of one another. New relationships of laity and clergy would develop; church-community ties would be strengthened; duplication and competition of programs could be avoided; social action groups would find new strength in a united base of operation; declining churches and communities would be given new options for the future; -- in short, both church and community would be renewed for clustering is a process of church renewal. Through the Cluster Model, the churches in a Functional Community are given new resources to be used. But the Cluster Model is more than renewal--it is the means of building a different kind of church and developing a

different kind of community--a church and community not built on the tradition of the past alone, on denominational or local loyalties or self-preservation, but a church and community built on the capacity to respond to personal and social issues, to be a structure of ecumenical, community-wide cooperation and hope.

AREA MINISTRY MODEL:

The Area Ministry Model (see diagram Page 15) is another approach that the churches can use by which to work together in meeting the needs of people in the Functional Community. It is a model that could be put into effect in West Colchester County for the benefit of the whole Functional Community. The Area Ministry Model has the potential of enabling the churches of West Colchester County to become vital institutions in the community. Some of the "fine points" f the Area Ministry are as follows:

1. The area should be a specified geographical functional area such as a county, or a functional economic area, designated as an area for ministry. West Colchester County is such a functional community. In many ways it functions as a whole--as one community.

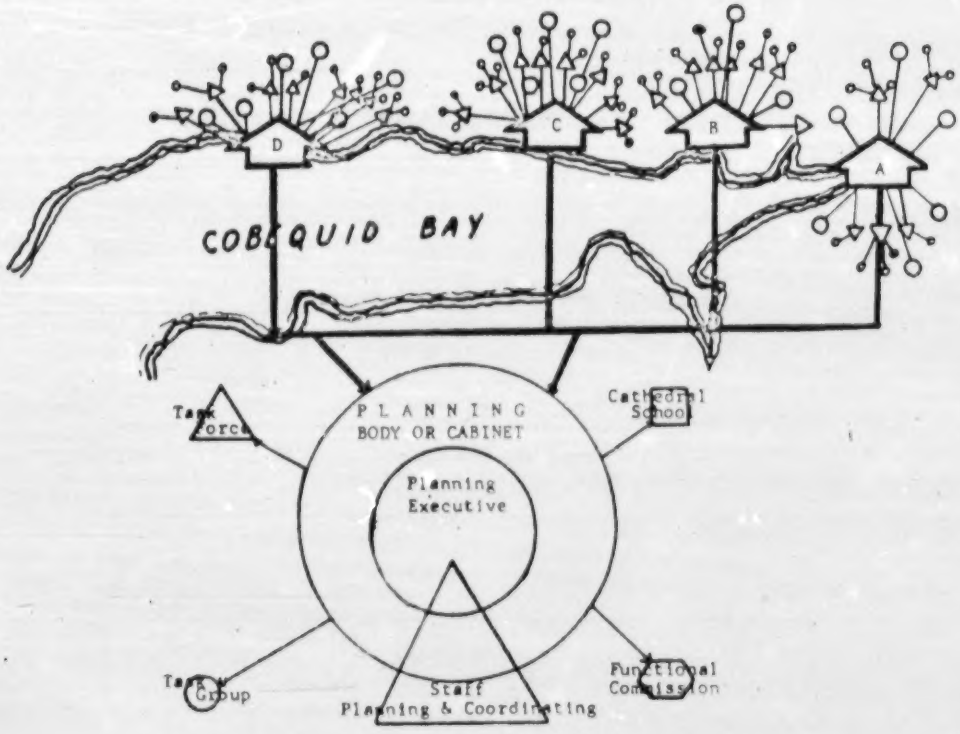
2. In an Area Ministry the appointed ministers and pastors, along with responsible laymen, learn how to work together as a team to serve the needs of all the people in the area.

3. A process of discovery of the needs of the area and the resources to meet those needs is set up (again, use might be made of the planning proce s for this purpose). The most immediate and urgent needs could be determined and specific programs designed to meet those needs. Short and long term programs as well as training opportunities are sponsored by the churches in the area.

4. Continuing education for clergy and laity is a basic ingredient of this model; education that will help the clergy and laity to be sensitive and responsible leaders.

This model is similiar to the Cluster Model in many ways. Central to it is he Planning Body or Cabinet. The planning body could function best with some taff capacity trained in planning that could be related realistically to the eds of a rural area such as West Colchester County.

WEST COLCHESTER AREA MINISTRY MODEL



- Ecumenical Community Areas Served by parish clergy & lay leaders.
- Local neighbourhood congregations
- Neighbourhood (nuclear) groups
- Congregational groups

It should be said that this model is a bit more formal and structured than the Cluster Model. If the planning body is to be the "hub" of the model, then it will need the resources of budget and staff to carry out the tasks the local churches and community areas would not be able to do alone.

Churches in the Area Ministry Model enter into a working relationship whereby they can more effectively deploy their clergy and lay leadership so as to relate and respond to the needs of the community.

In order to provide the continuing education necessary for staff and laity, The Cathedral School is rather central to this model. Clergy who have been out of seminary for a number of years need additional training. Clergy who are to work in Staff-Team relationships need help in how to cope with and operate in this type of relationship. Many rural areas, such as West Colchester, are located a fair distance from the centers where continuing theological education is available. The Area Ministry could bring together the clergy of the whole functional area once a week for a given period to which a lecturer or trainer could travel; courses could be in response to local parish needs. Clergy who need special training in relation to their job responsibilities may be equipped for their work through the Cathedral School. Lay people could also be trained in order to better fulfill their ministry. A rural parish organizational model involving an ordained minister, a lay leader and a part-time secretary might be a suitable staff to carry on a well-rounded church program in a larger community area.

The Area Ministry when applied to West Colchester County has two larger considerations:

(1) The Area Ministry could (and perhaps should) include the town of Truro, and the north and south parts of the county, Bible Hill, North River, Brookfield to Shubenacadie. This would give the greater financial, personnel and physical resources to provide a strong planning and clergy-laity educational program. In this case West Colchester would be one of the segments or sub-areas of the model.

(2) The other possibility is to put this model into effect on a smaller scale for just the Functional Area of West Colchester. Here the resources available would be much more limited and might require some national church funds in order to give the model the resources by which to operate. Great Village is the natural center of the area where the Cathedral School might be set up.

It could also be the focal point of the Area Ministry, where any full-time staff would be located, plus space for staff meetings and training events. The United Church at Great Village, as well as the Elementary School could provide the physical facilities and space for the West Colchester Area Ministry model.

A mistake to be avoided in regrouping churches and parishes is the isolating of small groups of people (neighbourhoods) from the institutional and gathered church. Sometimes this comes about with the closure of a church building in a neighbourhood--a building which it is no longer practical or viable to keep in use--but the few people who are in that neighbourhood may have life-long attachments that are not easily transferred to a nearby village or neighbourhood--for many of these people have been programmed by the lessons and experiences of the past to resent, resist and reject the close friendship of people living in nearby neighbourhoods or larger towns, even though they may tolerate them long enough to buy their groceries, get the auto repaired, or do such business that is necessary. The solution to this problem may be for the church to make a conscious effort to formulate and sustain neighbourhood groups or fellowships together with those of their own neighbourhood, and possibly facilitating a blending of "outsiders" into the groups occasionally in order to break down the barriers and heal the hostilities.

THE PASTORAL ZONE MODEL:

The model of parish organization, The Pastoral Zone, suggested by the Commission on Union of the Anglican, United and Christian Churches in Canada is one that could be put into effect in West Colchester County. The Pastoral Zone Council

could be the body responsible for planning for the total program of nurture and mission of the church in West Colchester County. A great deal of what has been said about the Cluster and Area Ministry Models can be put into effect in the Pastoral Zone Model as well. The Pastoral Zone Model in West Colchester County is diagrammed on Page 19.

The Pastoral Zone Center of office could be established in a community such as Great Village (or Glenholme). The necessary staff to carry out the church's mission in the area would plan and work together as one staff of the total area, utilizing their several abilities and gifts for the good of the whole Pastoral Zone.

Smaller zones might be organized in line with the area designated but these would be rather small and would possibly lack the financial and leadership resources by which to fulfil the best type of ministry. The smaller areas might be considered as sub-zones, with some organizational facility for bringing them together regularly for planning and evaluation. In any case, the staff should be used for the advantage of the whole Pastoral Zone or Functional Community.

Implementation of Models

The research in West Colchester demonstrated that the area is a viable Functional Community and suitable as a base for more appropriate models of parish organization. The Planning Process and The Social Action Process are recommended as the means of implementing the new models. Both of these are well known to social planners and community workers. They have been sufficiently tested as processes that will enable action to take place and involve indigenous decision makers. Elaboration of these processes is made in the final chapter (Chapter VI) of the research document.

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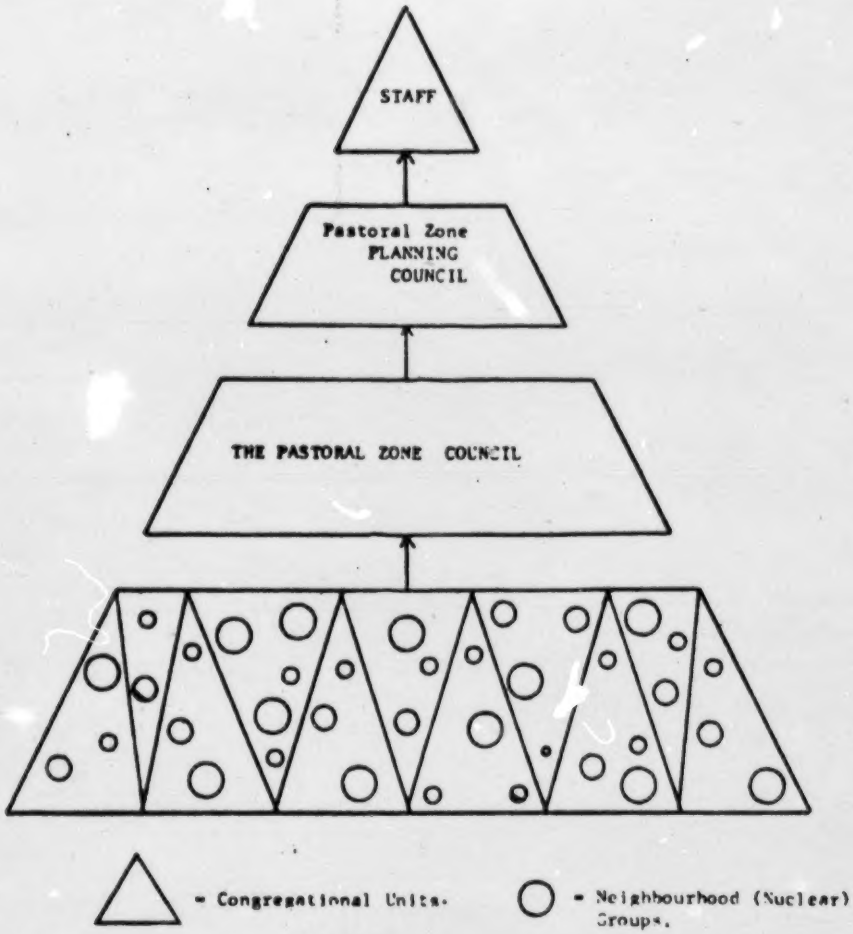
WEST COLCHESTER PASTORAL ZONE MODEL



Conclusion:

The church parish system or organization should correspond as closely as possible with the community and the way it functions. Rural communities since 1930 have increased in scale and function; rural parish systems have not kept pace -- they need to be reformed and reshaped based on the kind of community that now exists. The rural parish system needs to tie together into a working whole the various groups, churches, denominations and individuals into a cell-like organization that will provide trust, thrust and christian nurture for the entire community. There are several models of rural parish organization that can be adapted to the enlarged functional community.

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FOOTNOTES:

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Christian Rural Research and Resource Service

R.R.1 Debert, Nova Scotia

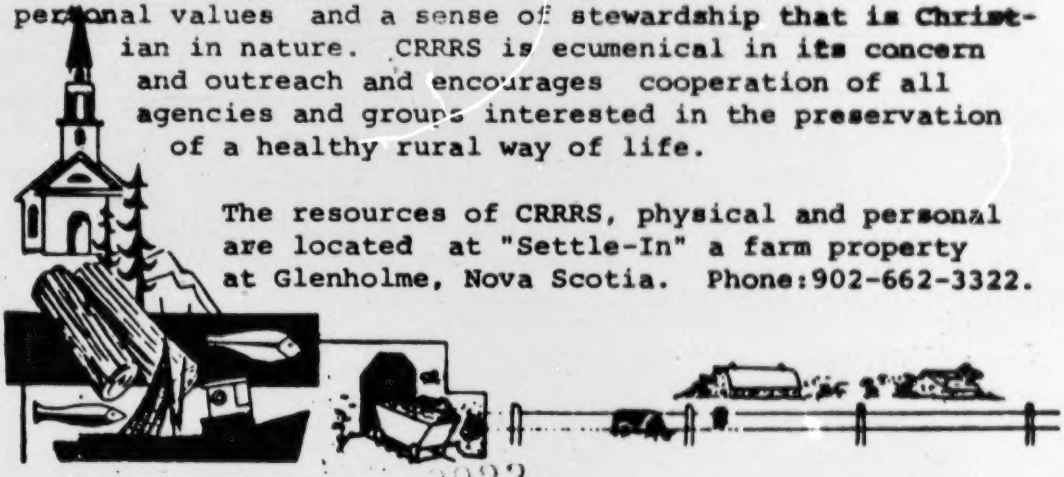
C.R.R.R.S. has been organized by Lester & Marion Settl to provide leadership, research facilities and resources devoted to creating and maintaining rural communities where people may enjoy and experience a "fullness of life" quality.

Lester has done research and study in rural sociology at a Master's level and feels it is important to apply some of the insights of sociology to the religious and theological disciplines.

A quarterly newsletter, "RURAL GLEANINGS" is published by CRRRS and is available at the address above. Occasional papers and resources for rural ministry(lay or clergy)are also prepared and made available from time to time.

Through CRRRS it is hoped to encourage new forms of rural community life with an emphasis upon Christian values, personal values and a sense of stewardship that is Christian in nature. CRRRS is ecumenical in its concern and outreach and encourages cooperation of all agencies and groups interested in the preservation of a healthy rural way of life.

The resources of CRRRS, physical and personal are located at "Settle-In" a farm property at Glenholme, Nova Scotia. Phone:902-662-3322.



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